

concerts from the library of congress 2010-2011

The McKim Fund
in the Library of Congress

John Adams
eighth blackbird

Walter Dyer

William Kye
Friday, May 20, 2011
8 o'clock in the evening
Coolidge Auditorium
Thomas Jefferson Building

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The Library of Congress
Coolidge Auditorium

Friday, May 20, 2011 – 8 p.m.

eighth blackbird

Tim Munro, *flutes* Michael J. Maccaferri, *clarinets*
Matt Albert, *violin/viola* Nicholas Photinos, *cello*
Matthew Duvall, *percussion* Lisa Kaplan, *piano*



PROGRAM

Still Life with Avalanche

Missy MAZZOLI
(b. 1980)

... à mesure

Philippe HUREL
(b. 1955)

Music in Similar Motion

Philip GLASS
(b. 1937)

Intermission

Netsuke: Six Miniatures for Violin and Piano

Stephen HARTKE
(b. 1952)

- I. Tengu, the shapeshifter that feeds on the falsely holy
- II. Tadamori and the Oil-Thief
- III. Tanuki playing the samisen
- IV. Baku, the monster that devours nightmares
- V. Demons carrying a rich man to Hell
- VI. Jewel of Wisdom with mountain pavilions

World Premiere

Commissioned by the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress

- I. Procession
- II. Fanfares
- III. Narration
- IV. Spikefiddlers
- V. Cradle-songs
- VI. Celebration

*Commissioned for eighth blackbird by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition
at Brigham Young University*

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

"Still Life" is the title of tonight's program, described by the artists as an "absorbing, entertaining, and motley concert highlighting the kaleidoscopic diversity of recent classical music." Its centerpiece is Stephen Hartke's *Netsuke: Six Miniatures for Violin and Piano*, a commission of the Library of Congress McKim Fund. Hartke's Pulitzer Prize finalist, "Meanwhile", evokes the surreal world of an imaginary Asian court theater with the help of myriad invented instruments. Frenchman Philippe Hurel's dense, swirling hive of notes, "... à mesure", challenges even eighth blackbird's formidable skills. Music by two New York natives rounds out the program. Philip Glass's "Music in Similar Motion", with its radically bold, hypnotic repetitions, retains its power to shock and delight, and rising star Missy Mazzoli's "Still Life with Avalanche", "a pile of melodies collapsing in a chaotic free fall", gives musical form to a torrent of powerful and unexpected emotions.

Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980) *Still Life with Avalanche* (2008)

Born in 1980 in Pennsylvania, Missy Mazzoli was recently deemed "one of the more consistently inventive, surprising composers now working in New York" by the *New York Times*, and "Brooklyn's post-millennial Mozart" by Time Out New York. Her music has been performed all over the world by the Kronos Quartet, eighth blackbird, the Minnesota Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra, New York City Opera, the South Carolina Philharmonic, NOW Ensemble and many others. Upcoming projects include the premiere of her chamber opera, *Song from the Uproar*, at New York City venue The Kitchen, and a new orchestral work for the League of Composers Chamber Orchestra. She is the recipient of four ASCAP Young Composer Awards, a Fulbright Grant, and grants from the Jerome Foundation and the Barlow Endowment. Now the Executive Director of the MATA Festival in New York City, Missy is also an active pianist, and often performs with Victoire, an "all-star, all-female quintet" (Time Out New York) she founded in 2008 dedicated exclusively to her own compositions. Missy attended

the Yale School of Music (M.M. 2006), the Royal Conservatory of the Hague (post-graduate studies 2002-2004) and Boston University (B.M. 2002). Her principal teachers were Louis Andriessen, Martijn Padding, Richard Ayres, David Lang, Martin Bresnick, Aaron Jay Kernis, Charles Fussell, Richard Cornell, Martin Amlin and John Harbison.

Recent projects have included the premiere of *Sound of the Light*, a new work commissioned by Carnegie Hall and two performances of *These Worlds In Us* by the Minnesota Orchestra, and new works commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, eighth blackbird, the Whitney Museum of Art and the Santa Fe New Music Ensemble. The composer writes:

Still Life with Avalanche is a pile of melodies collapsing in a chaotic free fall. The players layer bursts of sound over the static drones of harmonicas, sketching out a strange and evocative sonic landscape. I wrote this piece while in residence at Blue Mountain Center, a beautiful artist colony in upstate New York. Halfway through my stay there I received a phone call telling me my cousin had passed away very suddenly. There's a moment in this piece when you can hear that phone call, when the piece changes direction, when the shock of real life works its way into the music's joyful and exuberant exterior. This is a piece about finding beauty in chaos, and vice versa. It is dedicated to the memory (the joyful, the exuberant and the shocking) of Andrew Rose.

Still Life with Avalanche was commissioned by eighth blackbird through the generous support of Frederica and James R. Rosenfield, Kathleen Johnson and Paul Browning, Kirk Johnson, and William Johnson.

Philippe Hurel (b.1955) ... *à mesure* (1996)

Philippe Hurel (b. 1955) is a French composer of primarily orchestral and chamber works that have been performed throughout the world. Philippe Hurel studied musicology at the Université de Toulouse from 1974-79 and composition with Betsy Jolas and Ivo Malec at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris from 1980-83. He also had private studies in musical computer science with Tristan Murail in Paris in 1983. He worked as a music researcher and taught composition at IRCAM, and served as composer-in-residence to the Arsenal de Metz and the Philharmonie de Lorraine. With Pierre André Valade he founded the new music ensemble Court-circuit in 1990 and has since served as its artistic director.

Critic Sylviane Falcinelli writes, "He'll tell you he likes systems, but observe, rather, the warmly exuberant voice, the zany vocabulary and the sparkling looks that shine from him while he's juggling with theories, and you'll learn a lot more about the bubbling excitement from which each of his composing projects draws its vigor. He'll sing the praises of objectivity in art: get to know him, and you'll discover the intimately humane aspect, the poetic wonder and enthusiastic generosity which temper the harrowing vertigo that one experiences when faced with infinite possibilities. Cheekiness is the elegant mask that this reader of Goethe likes to wear. Systems, computer-

calculations and objectivity are merely the safeguards he uses to try and channel—precisely—that speck of madness which breathes the life of the unpredictable into the most skillfully configured combinations. This is why his music speaks to us . . .”

The title, . . . *à mesure* makes reference to the French expression “au fur et à mesure”, which means “progressively” or “little by little.” The piece is an unpredictable, constantly shifting kaleidoscope of textures and sounds that stretches the ensemble to its absolute technical limits. The work explodes with an initial gesture of unhinged, forceful violence; this opening recurs several times, like a crash viewed from strikingly different angles, each time disintegrating and evolving “progressively” in different and unexpected ways: gestures speed up, careening dangerously as if locked in fast-forward; a fragment is repeated endlessly, looped into rigid, machine-like patterns, as if stuck in repeat; the music swims slowly through musical mud, as if caught in slow-mo. Having seemingly exhausted itself, . . . *à mesure* ends shrouded in mystery, with gauzy ensemble textures and tolling bells conjuring an uncertain, even funereal, atmosphere.

Philip Glass (b. 1937) *Music in Similar Motion* (1969)

Through his operas, his symphonies, his compositions for his own ensemble, and his wide-ranging collaborations with artists ranging from Twyla Tharp to Allen Ginsberg, Woody Allen to David Bowie, Philip Glass has had an extraordinary and unprecedented impact upon the musical and intellectual life of his times. Glass is the first composer to win a wide, multi-generational audience in the opera house, the concert hall, the dance world, in film and in popular music, simultaneously.

He was born in 1937 and grew up in Baltimore. He studied at the University of Chicago, the Juilliard School and in Aspen with Darius Milhaud. Finding himself dissatisfied with much of what then passed for modern music, he moved to Europe, where he studied with the legendary pedagogue Nadia Boulanger (who also taught Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson and Quincy Jones) and worked closely with the sitar virtuoso and composer Ravi Shankar. He returned to New York in 1967 and formed the Philip Glass Ensemble—seven musicians playing keyboards and a variety of woodwinds, amplified and fed through a mixer. The new musical style that Glass was evolving was eventually dubbed “minimalism.” Glass himself never liked the term and preferred to speak of himself as a composer of “music with repetitive structures.” Much of his early work was based on the extended reiteration of brief, elegant melodic fragments that wove in and out of an aural tapestry. Or, to put it another way, it immersed a listener in a sort of sonic weather that twists, turns, surrounds, develops.

Philip Glass’s performance note for *Music in Similar Motion* gives a good indication of what to expect from this experimental early work:

“In theory, the leader of the ensemble could indicate sufficient repeats that the work would last all night. The piece should be played at a constant dynamic: loud.” It is a headlong rush of fast, steady, seemingly unstoppable, constantly revolving eighth notes, resulting in music that is stark, bald, repetitive, hypnotic. Glass has reduced each musical element to its

simplest form: one harmony is sustained for the entire piece; melodies are constructed of two- or three-note fragments; the rhythm is generated by the fast, steady notes of melodies. The composer writes, "The real innovation in *Similar Motion* is its sense of drama. The earlier pieces were meditative, steady-state pieces that established a mood and stayed there. But *Similar Motion* starts with one voice, then adds another playing a fourth above the original line, and then another playing a fourth below the original line, and finally a last line kicks in to complete the sound. As each new voice enters, there is a dramatic change in the music." The work can be played by any combination of instruments.

Stephen Hartke (b. 1952) *Netsuke: Six Miniatures for Violin and Piano* (World premiere, Commissioned by the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress); ***Meanwhile: Incidental music to imaginary puppet plays***

Stephen Hartke is widely recognized as one of the leading composers of his generation, whose work has been hailed for both its singularity of voice and the inclusive breadth of its inspiration. Born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1952, Hartke grew up in Manhattan where he began his musical career as a professional boy chorister, performing with such organizations as the New York Pro Musica, the New York Philharmonic, the American Symphony Orchestra, and the Metropolitan Opera. Following studies at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of California at Santa Barbara, interrupted by stints as advertising manager for several major music publishers, Hartke taught in Brazil as Fulbright Professor at the Universidade de São Paulo, before joining the University of Southern California faculty in 1987.

The composer's music reflects the diversity of his musical background, from medieval and renaissance polyphony, of which he was once quite an active performer, to very personal syntheses of diverse elements from non-Western and popular music. His output is extremely varied, from the medieval-inspired piano quartet, *The King of the Sun*, and *Wulfstan at the Millennium*, an abstract liturgy for ten instruments, the blues-inflected violin duo, *Oh Them Rats Is Mean in My Kitchen*, and the surreal trio, *The Horse with the Lavender Eye*, to the Biblical satire, *Sons of Noah*, for soprano, four flutes, four guitars and four bassoons, and his recent cycle of motets for chorus, oboe and strings, *Precepts*. Hartke has composed concerti for renowned clarinetist, Richard Stoltzman, and violinist, Michele Makarski, and his collaboration with the internationally-celebrated Hilliard Ensemble has resulted in three substantial works, including his Symphony No. 3, commissioned by Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic. Most recently his acclaimed full-length opera, *The Greater Good*, was premiered and recorded by Glimmerglass Opera. Other major commissions have come from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall and the Harvard Musical Association, the IRIS Chamber Orchestra, the Kansas City Symphony, the Library of Congress, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Moscow State Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Barlow Endowment, Chamber Music America, the Fromm

Foundation, the Institute for American Music at the Eastman School of Music, Meet The Composer, the National Endowment of the Arts, and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, among others.

Stephen Hartke has also won the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, two Koussevitzky Music Foundation Commission Grants, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Stoeger Award from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Charles Ives Living from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Deutsche Bank Berlin Prize from the American Academy in Berlin. In 2008, Hartke's opera, *The Greater Good*, received the first Charles Ives Opera Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Most of Hartke's music is available on commercial CDs released by Bridge, Chandos, CRI, ECM New Series, EMI Classics, Naxos American Classics, and New World Records.

Stephen Hartke lives in Glendale, California and is Professor of Composition at the University of Southern California.

About *Netsuke*: Six Minatures for Violin and Piano, the composer writes:

Netsuke are Japanese miniature carvings that were originally made to secure objects suspended from a man's sash. Often very intricate in design, they represent a broad range of subject matters from depictions of animals and people, to scenes from folk-tales and literature as well as everyday life, to fanciful supernatural creatures. This piece was inspired by six exquisite carvings from the Bushell Collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

In the first movement, a *tengu*, a hawk-like goblin takes on the appearance of a monk to lure a religious hypocrite to his doom. The second carving is a wonderfully kinetic depiction of a midnight scuffle between a samurai and a poor servant whom he has mistaken for a thief.

A *tanuki* is a raccoon-like creature thought to have the power to change its appearance. In this small sculpture one is seen dressed in a monk's robe quietly playing the *samisen*. In my piece, I found myself thinking of the *samisen* duels that one frequently hears in Japanese theatrical music. While quite fearsome looking, with the head of an elephant and a lion's mane, the *baku* is a shy creature that performs the useful service of protecting sleepers from nightmares.

In the carving that inspired the fifth movement, a rich man has apparently set off on a journey, but instead of being carried by his usual bearers, seven demons have hijacked his sedan chair and gleefully cart him down to Hell.

The final *netsuke* shows a serene mountain landscape intricately rendered in a water-drop-shaped piece of ivory. Gnarled wind-blown trees and the verandas of handsome pavilions can be discerned through the mist.

Commissioned by the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress, *Netsuke* is dedicated in friendship and gratitude to Matt Albert and Lisa Kaplan of *eighth blackbird*.

Meanwhile was composed on a commission from eighth blackbird and the Barlow Foundation, and it was nominated for the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Music. It is one of several works of mine that has grown from a long-standing fascination I have had for various forms of Asian court and theater music, and in preparing to write this piece, I studied video clips of quite a number of puppet theater forms, ranging from the elegant and elaborate, nearly-life-sized puppets of Japanese *Bunraku*, to Vietnamese water puppets, both Indonesian and Turkish shadow puppets, and to classic Burmese court theater that mixes marionettes with dancers who look and act like marionettes.

This piece is a set of incidental pieces to no puppet plays in particular, but one in which the ensemble has been reinvented along lines that clearly have roots in these diverse Asian models. The piano, for instance, is prepared for much of the piece with large soft mutes to resemble a Vietnamese hammered dulcimer. The viola is tuned a half-step lower in order to both change its timbre and to open the way for a new set of natural harmonics to interact sometimes even microtonally with those of the cello. The percussion array includes 18 wood sounds, plus 4 cowbells, 2 small cymbals, a water gong, and a set of bongos. Finally, there is a set of three Flexatones, whose tone is rather like that of small Javanese gongs, and so I have given this new instrument the name of Flexatone Gamelan.

Meanwhile is played as a single movement, with 6 distinct sections: *Procession*, which features the flexatone Gamelan; *Fanfares*, with the piccolo and bass clarinet linked together much as a puppeteer and his marionette; *Narration*, in which the bass clarinet recites the 'story' of the scene in an extravagant and flamboyant solo reminiscent of the reciter in Japanese *Bunraku*; *Spikefiddlers*, which requires a playing technique for the viola and later the cello that stems from Central Asian classical music; *Cradle-songs*, the outer parts of which feature natural harmonics in the viola and cello combined with bell-like 9th-partial harmonics from the piano; and *Celebration*, where the flutist and clarinetist take up flexatones to play the closing melody.



Grammy-winning eighth blackbird promises—and delivers—provocative and mind-changing performances to its burgeoning audiences. Combining bracing virtuosity with an alluring sense of irreverence, the sextet debunks the myth that contemporary music is only for a cerebral few. The ensemble attracts fans of all ages to its performances and recordings, which sparkle with wit and pound with physical energy; it inhabits and explores the sound-world of new music with comfort, conviction, and infectious enthusiasm. eighth blackbird is lauded for its performing style—often playing from memory with theatrical flair—and for making new music accessible to wide audiences. “It’s new music you can bring home to your mother,” observed the *Washington Post*. Profiled in the *New York Times* and NPR’s *All Things Considered*, the sextet has also been featured on BloombergTV’s *Muse*, *CBS News Sunday Morning*, *St. Paul Sunday*, *Weekend America*, and *The Next Big Thing*, among others. The group is in residence at the University of Richmond in Virginia and the University of Chicago.

Now celebrating its 15th season, eighth blackbird showcases music by the two most recent Pulitzer Prize-winning composers, Jennifer Higdon and Steve Reich, in its 2010–11 recording and performing repertoire. Highlights include a return to Zankel Hall; performances at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art; a tour of Higdon’s new concerto *On a Wire* with several high-profile orchestras; Reich festivals on both sides of the Atlantic—at Carnegie Hall and London’s Barbican Hall; the world premiere performance of Stephen Hartke’s new Library of Congress commission, *Netsuke: Six Miniatures for Violin and Piano*, in the Coolidge Auditorium this evening; and two new CDs, featuring, respectively, Reich’s prize-winning *Double Sextet* (on Nonesuch) and Steven Mackey and Rinde Eckert’s music-theater piece *Slide* (on Cedille). Headlining the group’s season is its new politically-driven two-part program “Powerful/less”, tackling Stravinsky’s provocative statement questioning the value, meaning and power of art. World premieres included Mark-Anthony Turnage’s *Grazioso!* and Jennifer Higdon’s new concerto for sextet and orchestra with the Atlanta Symphony.

Highlights of recent seasons included collaborations and performances with conservatory students from Oberlin and Los Angeles’s Colburn School; debuts in the UK (Liverpool), Rotterdam, and Australia (Melbourne); and eighth blackbird’s own “hometown” series over three years at Chicago’s prestigious Harris Theater, featuring guest artists such as Glenn Kotche and the Hilliard Ensemble. The sextet was Music Director of the famed Ojai Music Festival, where, as part of its “wild musical party,” the ensemble gave the world premiere of *Slide*. It performed new commissions by Steve Reich, by David Lang, Michael Gordon, and Julia Wolfe, by Frederic Rzewski, and by Stephen Hartke; it toured Osvaldo Golijov’s song-cycle *Ayre* with soprano Dawn Upshaw, and performed a fully memorized and staged cabaret-opera version of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*. Venue debuts at Zankel Hall and The Kitchen in New York City, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Houston Friends of Music, and Pittsburgh’s Chamber Music Society attest to eighth blackbird’s burgeoning allure—for both audiences and presenters.

The sextet has appeared in Canada, Mexico, the Netherlands, and South Korea; at nearly every major chamber music venue in North America, with performances at

Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, Kennedy Center, Library of Congress, Cleveland Museum of Art, and La Jolla Chamber Music Society; and has been concert soloist with the Utah Symphony and the American Composers Orchestra. A summer favorite, the group has appeared several times at Cincinnati's Music X, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, also performing at Tanglewood, New York's 20th annual Bang on a Can Marathon, and Bravo!-Vail.

Since its founding in 1996, eighth blackbird has actively commissioned and recorded new works from such eminent composers as Steve Reich, George Perle, Frederic Rzewski, and Joseph Schwantner, and has commissioned groundbreaking works from a younger generation (Jennifer Higdon, Stephen Hartke, Derek Bermel, David Schober, Daniel Kellogg, and Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez). The group was honored in 2007 with the American Music Center's Trailblazer Award and a Meet The Composer Award. eighth blackbird received the first BMI/Boudleaux-Bryant Fund Commission, was the first contemporary music group to win the Grand Prize at the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, won the 2000 Naumburg Chamber Music Award and the 2004 NEA/CMA Special Commissioning Award, and has received grants from BMI, Meet The Composer, the Greenwall Foundation, and Chamber Music America, among many others.

The members of eighth blackbird hold degrees in music performance from Oberlin Conservatory, among other institutions. The group derives its name from the Wallace Stevens poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The eighth stanza reads:

*I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.*



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